



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

January 16-January 31, 2010

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

New Pashto Radio Programming Extends

Audience Reach: On January 30, Salam Watandar, Internews Network radio, launched its new Pashto-language service, targeting audiences in the south and southeast of the country. Since the majority of Afghans receive their news and information from radio, the introduction of expanded Pashto programming is essential to reach a broader audience.

The service offers daily news, current affairs, and cultural programming in two 90-minute blocks from 7-8:30 am and from 6-7:30 pm. The program line-up includes Pashto versions of other popular Salam Watandar programs; sports, religion, poetry, local culture, and government affairs programs; as well as "Bakhabar" ("Look Out"), a popular current affairs show. In addition, the program offers hourly Pashto news bulletins throughout the day.



The producers and reporters for Salam Watandar's new Pashto-language service.

PHOTO: USAID/Internews

Aashiquallah Yaqub headed up Salam Watandar's recruiting effort to find local Pashto-speaking journalists and producers to produce the show. "The launch of the new channel marks a milestone in our effort to expand our audience reach," Yaqub says. "Calls on live programs have jumped from Pashto-speaking parts of the country."

The new Pashto channel is offered as an optional service to Salam Watandar's network of 40 partner stations, which reaches 60 percent of the Afghan population. As of February 5, 11 stations in nine provinces have switched to the new service, and three others are either airing the programs on alternating days or broadcasting selected programs.



A farmer in Dand prepares his greenhouse for winter planting.

PHOTO: USAID/WOCCU

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Sharia-compliant Financing Helps Kandahar

Farmers: The Kandahar Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative (KIIFC) is helping area farmers have a successful winter planting season by providing a wide range of Sharia-compliant financial services to its members.

The cooperative recently provided between \$500 to \$800 each to 25 Dand district vegetable growers who completed USAID-funded greenhouse farming training. The farmers received the much-needed



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capital to buy equipment that will enable them to grow vegetables during winter months.

The KIIFC is a community-based, member-owned institution that has already disbursed \$630,000 in Sharia-compliant financing to its members. So far, 71 percent of these funds have been invested in agriculture production in the area.



Bibi Ayesha (above) and 119 other women learned to weave gabion at a USAID training.

PHOTO: USAID/IDEA-NEW

AGRICULTURE

Gabion Basket Weaving Provides Income for Women and Protects Agricultural Land: In Puli Khumri in Baghlan province, USAID recently held a training program to teach 120 local women to weave gabion baskets. Gabion baskets are made of wire mesh filled with stone and used to build flood protection walls or retaining walls along the banks of rivers. Preventing flooding and erosion, the gabion baskets and the walls they construct are important structures that protect Afghanistan's agricultural land.

The participants will be able to earn an income using their newly acquired skills to weave gabion baskets

for upcoming USAID-funded gabion protection wall projects in the province. "We are very happy with this project, because on the one hand we are getting skills on how to weave gabions, and on the other hand we have a source of income to enable us to support our families," said trainee Bibi Ayesha from Puli Khumri.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

Improved Road Builds Confidence in Local

Government: When villagers in the Chahar Chineh district in Uruzgan asked their local governor for help improving the Sarsino Pass, he worked closely with USAID and its Local Governance and Community Development Program to improve the road. During the project, 50 villagers were hired to widen and improve the steep, narrow 1,000-meter road.

The success of the project has helped overcome the villagers' isolation, instilled confidence in the governor, and triggered an influx of new requests for projects.



Sakhar villagers work to widen and improve their road.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD



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EDUCATION

English Training Prepares Professors for Next Semester: On January 28, five lecturers from Sheik Zayed University in Khost completed an intensive, 45-day International English Language Testing System (IELTS) course provided by USAID's Afghan eQuality Alliances (AeQA) at Kabul Polytechnic University. Thanks to the small class size, English instructors were able to work closely with faculty members to design classroom exercises and to prepare for the IELTS exam at the British Council in Kabul. Like the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam, a passing score on the IELTS exam is a prerequisite for many international study abroad programs.

Participating faculty were pleased to have the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills in preparation for the next academic term in March. One of the professors has already taken the IELTS exam and is awaiting his test results. The other four participants will take the IELTS exam later next month. In the meantime, the faculty members look forward to continuing their English studies in Khost and are eager to use their new English skills in the classroom. "[USAID's] Afghan eQuality Alliances is the only one providing IT and English language classes for faculty members at our university. Without Afghan eQuality Alliances, we wouldn't be able to improve our English skills," said a Sheikh Zayed University faculty member.

Developing proficiency in foreign languages is one major emphasis of the recently inaugurated Ministry of Higher Education Strategic Plan. AeQA offers IT and English language courses at Afghan Next Generation eLearning (ANGeL) Centers at Balkh University, Hirat University, Kabul Polytechnic University, Kabul University, and Nangarhar University.